

14 *THE CASTAWAYS OF THE FLAG*

south-west, the clouds still hung in heavy masses, over three-quarters of the circumference of the sky, It was still impossible to see more than a few cables³ lengths from the boat, and beyond that distance no ship could have been detected*

As the breeze had freshened, the sheet had to be hauled in, the foresail, whose gear was slackened, hoisted, and the course veered a point or two, so as to give the jib a hold on the wind,

" We've got it; we've got it! " the boatswain said cheerily, and the boat, heeling gently over to starboard, dipped her nose into the first waves*

Little by little the rent in the clouds grew bigger and spread overhead. The sky assumed a reddish lue* It seemed that the wind might hold to the present quarter for some little time, and that the period of calms had come to an end*

Hope of reaching land revived once more, or the alternative hope of falling in with a ship.

At five o'clock the rent in the clouds was ringed with a collar of vivid coloured clouds. It was the day, appearing with the suddenness peculiar to the low latitudes of the tropical regions* Soon purple rays of light arose above the horizon, like the sticks

of a fan. The rim of the solar disc,
heightened by
^the refraction, touched the horizon
line, drawn
"dearly now at the end of sky and sea*
At once the
rays of light caught on the Kttle clouds
which hung
in the high heaven, and dyed them
every shade of